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The *Transactions of the Philadelphia Area Token Kai* were created by the members of that club as exercises in the study of Japanese swords and fittings, usually in preparation for or as a consequence of a club meeting devoted to a specific topic. These are labors of love that make no claim to represent the most authoritative position, or the most current information on any of these topics. These papers are instead presented as models for study following logic that adopting an active approach to research and appreciation is more instructive than just visiting collections, building a library, reading, listening to others and taking notes. We hope that those who undertake similar tasks as a mode of study will find them as rewarding as did we.

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Introduction to the Study of Kodogu

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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF TSUBA AND KODOGU

THE INHERENT BEAUTY OF SWORD FITTINGS is something that has been shown to enjoy a wide appeal among a great many people. The level of technical proficiency as well as the remarkable range of visual invention make these objects unique in the field of metalwork. Yet, as great as is their appeal, so also are they a daunting subject of study, with a history as long and complex as that of the Japanese sword itself. While it will take the novice very little time to learn the basic forms and categories, such as Sukashi Tetsuji, Kinko, Tsuba, Menuki, Fuchi-kashira, etc., years of study will be necessary to gain the necessary depth of understanding that will result in a full appreciation of these works of art. This paper will deal with the problems facing the beginning student, while offering methods by which one might set about beginning a serious and successful study of Japanese sword fittings.

CONTEXT

Like a navigator, the collector and student must begin to chart a course based on an understanding of where precisely one is at the beginning of the journey. As with the navigator, it will be necessary to take bearing from time to time in order to be able to appraise one's progress. Begin by asking yourself a few simple questions, such as; "what are my resources?"

These might include;

- A. Academic training, literacy, verbal skills, etc., which may be of assistance in terms of giving you the means to organize your research.
- B. Access to bibliographic material; libraries, bookstores, etc. Much research must necessarily be based on other research. Having access to other scholarly works will save a lot of time and expense.
- C. Access to the actual objects to study; this might include other collectors, museums, study groups, etc. This will also include antique and art dealers from whom these objects can be purchased, auction houses, etc.
- D. The time ~~in~~ which you can give to study and to collecting.
- E. Goals. Set goals both in your collection and study that can be reached. It is often better to set a limited goal at first, and concentrate in one area than to drift about, learning a little here and there, while learning, in fact, very little at all.

BEGINNING

Before one may begin to consider oneself a serious collector, a commitment must be made to gain a basic understanding of the objects that one wishes to collect.

The most basic knowledge that will be necessary is that concerning the care and handling of the object. While in the eyes of the law, a collector holds title and ownership of the object in their collection, in the eyes of seasoned collectors and future generations, a collector is first and foremost a custodian or steward. When you buy a piece, you are actually buying the privilege of taking care of it. Chances are very good that with proper care, these objects will survive you and pass through many future collections for as long as proper care is given to it.

For instruction in these matters, consult the following sources:

Museum conservation specialists (with an expertise in metalwork)

Professional Metalworkers, artists working with jewelry, patinas, etc.

Experienced collectors of Japanese sword fittings. Be careful that you know the reputation of the person with whom you have chosen to consult. Inquire with one of the regional study groups or museum, etc.

Written materials such as books, articles, etc. dealing with the subject that have been given the endorsement of known authorities, such as the Japanese Sword Society of the United States, etc.

Never undertake any cleaning, restoration, etc. without doing a lot of research into the matter. Any damage to most Japanese metalwork cannot be adequately repaired. It is best to do nothing than to do something that will cause damage.

Remember- ignorance is your worst enemy, Patience your only ally and learning your only solution.

COLLECTING

Many consider collecting to be a shrewd means of investment. In fact, it is only occasionally profitable enough to justify the time that will be needed to develop a good collection, not to mention expense.

Profitable collecting depends on buying low and selling high. In order to do this, one must watch the collectible markets; auctions, etc- and buy things that are underpriced and sell them when the prices go up. This requires much research into the market so that your speculations will be well calculated to anticipate an upswing in prices. The problem with this is that you may not be able to collect what you are interested in, being bound to buy according to commercial wisdom rather than according to personal sensibility or focus. Since this paper deals with the study of Japanese sword fittings, the subject of market trends will be merely acknowledged and left to the scrutiny of the individual reader. Suffice it to say that sword fittings will rise and fall in price from time to time. Certain times will favor the buyer while others will favor the seller. By keeping up with auction prices, etc., you may be able to get a sense of what might be a high or low price for a given object at any or a particular time. Seeking the advice of an experienced collector who is willing to share their experience with you will be of great help. Unfortunately, some collectors are of a competitive nature and will do little to help an eager novice to understand the fine points or even the basics of buying and selling. One rule must always be followed; that it is better to buy one superior piece than to buy a dozen mediocre ones.

COLLECTING: STRATEGIES

When beginning a collection, facing so many possibilities, it is often difficult to know where precisely to begin, what to buy, where to focus your attentions. If you have already decided that fittings are of the most interest to you, that is in itself a major achievement in narrowing the field of possibilities. Eventually, you can expect to narrow the field even further; specializing in one school, epoch, genre or whatever. As a beginner, it is imperative to have items of superior quality to study. Very little can be learned from mediocre works and it is safe to suppose that the first thing to do is to become aware of those characteristics which separate high quality items from common or worse. The only way to do this is to seek out and concentrate on the best items available to you.

In the study of kodogu, the study of Kinko work is inescapable. Machi-bori kinko work employs an enormous range of materials and techniques as well as exploring unconventional designs based on diverse painting styles dealing with a wide range of subject matter. No better way can be found to acquaint the beginner with as ~~wide~~ large a variety of materials and techniques than to put them to work studying fine examples of Kinko machi-bori work, which are visually ver accessible and obvious in the display of technical virtuosity.

Early iron tsuba are becoming more collectible than in the past. However, these are visually much more challenging, and require a more refined aesthetic sense than do Kinko tsuba. The appreciation of beautiful sabi, tekkotsu and simple openwork designs is often a bit difficult for the beginner to grasp, despite the fact that in time one might fall completely in love with these relatively austere and esoteric examples of Japanese metalwork.

Being unsure of the quality of a piece, one might find a certain amount of security in buying one which has received an Origami or paper from one of the leading sword study organizations in Japan, such as the Nippon Bijutsu Tokan Hozon Kyokai or the Nihon Token Hozon Kai. Each issues papers at different levels of quality. A piece which is given a better paper is likely to be more desirable.

Origami categories

Nippon Bijutsu Token Hozon Kyokai: in order from lowest to highest

~~Kicho (lowest ranking paper issued)~~

(Pre-1983)

Kicho (white paper)

Tokubetsu Kicho (gray-green)

Koshu (lime-green)

Tokubetsu Koshu()

Juyo

(Post-1983)

Hozon

Tokubetsu Hozon

Juyo

Nihon Token Hozon Kai

Ninteisho (60-70 points)

Kanteisho (70-100 points)